

REMARKS

Claims 1-9, 27-32, and 34-48 will be pending upon entry of the present amendment. Claims 1, 27-32, and 34 have been amended, and new claims 36-48 are herein submitted.

Applicants thank the Examiner for participating in a telephone interview with the undersigned on November 19, 2003. In that interview, the undersigned representative discussed with the Examiner the subject matter of the pending claims, and how the claims compare to the cited prior art, and the art presented by the applicants in the Information Disclosure Statement of October 2, 2001. Among other things, it was pointed out to the Examiner that none of the art discussed teaches the limitations of claim 34, and in particular the limitation reciting, "an opening in the covering structure, extending in portions of the upper and side faces thereof...."

Applicants understand the Examiner to have indicated that this limitation was sufficient to distinguish claim 34 over the known art. Applicants further understand the Examiner to have indicated, barring discovery of new art, a willingness to allow other claims incorporating a similar limitation. Accordingly, claims 1, 31, and 32 have been amended to incorporate language substantially similar to the distinguishing language of claim 34.

The Examiner has rejected claims 1-9 and 27-32 under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph as being indefinite. With respect to claims 1 and 31, the Examiner asks whether these claims actually require the presence of a lead in the opening. With respect to claims 1 and 32, the Examiner states that, "The recitation that the opening in the covering structure is greater or larger than the end of a lead is vague and indefinite as to the specific structure being claimed."

Claim 1 has been amended to eliminate reference to the size of the opening, and to recite, "the opening being configured to receive a portion of a selected lead." Applicants note that claim 1 does not positively recite a lead, but rather an opening configured to receive a lead. The selected lead is positively recited in claim 27. Accordingly, claim 1 is now in condition for allowance.

With respect to claim 31, the applicants note that claim 31 does not recite a lead as a limitation of the claim, but rather recites an opening configured to admit a lead. Accordingly, claim 31 particularly points out and distinctly claims the subject matter which the applicants regard as their invention, and is therefore allowable.

Claim 32 has been amended to eliminate reference to the size of the opening, and is now in condition for allowance.

With respect to the Examiner's rejections under 35 U.S.C. § 102, these rejections are moot in light of the amendment to independent claims 1, 31, and 32, as discussed above with reference to the phone conference.

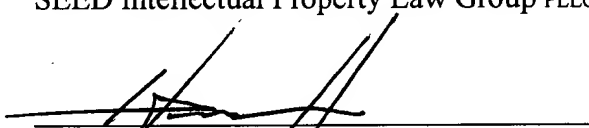
Claims 27-30 and 34 have been amended to correct errors of form and typography. These amendments do not alter the scope of the respective claims. New claims 36-48 are well supported by the specification, and, as a dependent claims of claim 34, are also allowable.

All of the claims remaining in the application are now clearly allowable. Favorable consideration and a Notice of Allowance are earnestly solicited. In the event the Examiner finds minor informalities that can be resolved by telephone conference, the Examiner is urged to contact applicants' undersigned representative at (206) 622-4900 in order to expeditiously resolve prosecution of this application.

The Commissioner is authorized to charge any additional fees due by way of this Amendment, or credit any overpayment, to our Deposit Account No. 19-1090.

Respectfully submitted,

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